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Angelo Poliziano's political orations: the humanist in government

In the last two years of his life, before his mysterious death on 24th September 1494,¹ Angelo Poliziano wrote four political texts that have been completely overlooked by scholars, but that prove to be crucially important from a number of perspectives. This is a corpus of four political orations composed for different official events between 1492 and 1494. Despite the extensive critical attention that Poliziano's works have always attracted – works belonging to manifold literary genres and encompassing three languages (Italian, Latin and Greek) – these oratorical texts have not received modern editions. They appeared for the first time in the *editio princeps* of Poliziano's *Opera omnia* published in 1498 in Venice by Aldo Manuzio and edited by the humanist's former pupils, Pietro Crinito and Alessandro Sarti;² then, in the sixteenth century, they were included in the other main edition of Poliziano's *Opera omnia* printed in Basel in 1553 and, more generally, in miscellaneous

¹ On the humanist's sudden death, which has been recently reinvestigated considering the hypothesis of poisoning, see Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l'umanesimo della parola* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), pp. 322-34; Carlo Dionisotti, 'Considerazioni sulla morte di Poliziano', in *Culture et société en Italie du Moyen-Age à la Renaissance: Hommage à André Rochon* (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1985), pp. 145-56; and now Paolo Orvieto, *Poliziano e l'ambiente mediceo* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2009), pp. 142-55.

² *Omnia opera Angeli Politiani et alia quaedam lectu digna quorum nomina in sequenti indice videre licet*, Venetiis, in aedibus Aldi Romani, mense Iulio M. IID [anastatic reproduction: Roma, Bibliopola, 1968], ff. aar-aaaiiiv. On this edition see Paolo Veneziani, 'Platone Benedetti e la prima edizione degli "Opera" del Poliziano', *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch*, 63 (1988), pp. 95-107; Aldo Manuzio *tipografo: 1494-1515. Catalogo* (Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 17 giugno-30 luglio 1994), ed. by Luciana Bigliazzi, Angela Dillon Bussi, Giancarlo Savino, Piero Scapecchi (Firenze: Franco Cantini Editore, 1994), pp. 57-58. The orations are briefly mentioned by Ida Maïer, *Ange Politien; la formation d'un poète humaniste, 1469-1480* (Genève: Droz, 1966), pp. 434-36.

collections of orations by various humanists, enjoying through these different publishing channels a considerable circulation throughout Europe.³

The first oration, with the title *Pro oratoribus Senensium ad Alexandrum sextum pontificem maximum* (*For the Sienese orators to Alexander VI pontifex maximus*), was written for the election of Pope Alexander VI which took place in August 1492. It was the speech that the Sienese legation, led by the ambassador Bartolomeo Sozzini, a famous Sienese jurist and a friend of Poliziano, delivered in Rome to celebrate the new pope, in October of the same year (the embassy was probably received by the pope on 4th October).⁴ The second oration, *Pro praetore Florentino ad dominos ineuntes summum magistratum* (*For the 'podestà' of Florence to the highest magistrates taking up office*), is the only speech in this corpus written for an event involving Florentine internal politics: the analysis of the *Registri dei Podestà* in the State Archive of Florence has revealed that it is the oration delivered by the new *podestà*, Antonio degli Albizzi from Città di Castello, on the 15th October 1493, in the presence of the magistrates who were appointed in the same year to work with him.⁵ Only a

³ *Angeli Politiani Opera quae quidem extitere hactenus omnia...*, Basileae, apud Nicolaum Episcopium Juniorem, 1553 [anastatic reproduction: Angelus Politianus, *Opera omnia scripta in editione Basilensi anno MDLIII collecta*, ed. by Ida Maier (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1971)], ff. 506-11. The orations were also included in numerous miscellaneous editions of orations by various humanists, published between 1505 and 1524 (13 editions in Paris and two in Basel); the first edition was published by Jean Petit: *Orationes, Praelectiones et Praefationes et quaedam mythicae historiae Philippi Beroaldi. Item Plusculae Angeli Politiani, Hermolai Barbari...* Parrhisiis, in aedibus Ascensianis, Jehan Petit, 1505.

⁴ The date of the diplomatic mission is mentioned in Alessandro Lisini, 'Relazioni tra Cesare Borgia e la Repubblica Senese', *Bullettino Senese di storia patria*, 7 (1900), 83-150 (pp. 88-89); there is also a reference in *Thomae Diplovatati Liber de claris iurisconsultis*, ed. by Fritz Schulz, Hermann Kantorowicz, Giuseppe Rabotti (Bologna: Institutum Gratianum, 1968), p. 413. On Sozzini's appointment as ambassador see Roberta Bargagli, *Bartolomeo Sozzini: giurista e politico (1436-1506)* (Milano: Giuffrè, 2000), pp. 175-76.

⁵ The date of the official delivery of the speech is mentioned in the title of the oration in the codex of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, Plut. XC, sup. 37 (f. 23v). The name of the *podestà* can be found in the State Archive of Florence, *Registri dei Podestà* (vol. 4, inv. 28, f. 789v). He was in charge from 3rd October 1493 to 5th March 1494,

few months later, Poliziano composed two more orations, written this time to commemorate the death of the king of Naples, Ferdinando of Aragon, who died on 25th January 1494, and to celebrate the immediate succession of his son and heir, Alfonso II. These speeches, both identified by the same title, *Pro oratoribus Florentinorum ad Alphonsum Siciliae regem* (*For the Florentine orators to Alfonso king of Sicily*), were composed to be delivered by the Florentine ambassadors sent to Naples on an official diplomatic mission. Of the group, they are probably the most politically significant, with fundamental implications also on a wider Italian scale, as we shall see.⁶

Although these orations are ‘minor’ works within Poliziano’s multifaceted output, the category of ‘minor’ as associated with the humanist’s texts has been recognized as problematic, because it is often in his not purely ‘literary’ writings and less canonical texts that we can find essential elements to gain a deeper understanding of his eclectic intellectual profile: this is also confirmed by Poliziano’s predilection for hybrid genres and unconventional literary forms, which allowed him to engage in creative experimentation.⁷ Moreover, despite seeming to be merely occasional pieces, exclusively connected with specific historical events, these orations turn out to be distinguished by a marked

as proved by his deeds (State Archive of Florence, *Acta criminalia, Liber condemnationum et absolutio-num*, n. 5434; *Acta civilia*, n. 5435).

⁶ On these texts see *infra*.

⁷ On this tendency in Poliziano’s works see Martin McLaughlin, ‘The dispute between Poliziano and Cortesi’, in Id., *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1995), pp. 188-227. The humanist’s ideas on imitation and eclecticism in literary writing are presented in different works: see in particular the *Oratio super Fabio Quintiliano et Statii Sylvis*, published in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. by Eugenio Garin (Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1952), pp. 870-85; and the preface to the first *Centuria* of the *Miscellanea*, published now in Eric MacPhail, ‘Angelo Poliziano’s Preface to the *Miscellaneorum Centuria Prima*: An Edition with Commentary and Translation’, *Erasmus Studies*, 35 (2015), 61-87. As for the genre of oratory, Poliziano also wrote another oratorical text as one of his introductory lectures to his academic courses, this time devoted to Homer: Angelo Poliziano, *Oratio in expositione Homeri*, ed. by Paola Megna (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007). On his *praelectiones* and the academic courses see Branca, pp. 86-87; Orvieto, pp. 375-91.

literary dimension. This aspect reflects the profoundly composite nature of the humanist's works, which embrace different components but always retain at their core a deep literary essence, nurtured by the author's erudite literary taste.⁸ In addition, these texts also give us the chance to explore from a new angle the close and multi-layered interplay between politics and literature in Renaissance Florence: an interaction that resulted in multiple outcomes throughout the fifteenth century. In particular, with specific attention to the area of Renaissance diplomacy, which was characterized by a substantial evolution in the fifteenth century,⁹ the analysis of Poliziano's speeches, considered as a case study, offers a further specific viewpoint on the heterogeneous genre of oratory, especially the sub-category of political oratory. It enjoyed widespread diffusion in the early modern period, but has not received enough attention in all its multiple features, and, most importantly, in its different

⁸ On the centrality of literature in Poliziano's work as the chief instrument of knowledge see Francesco Bausi, *Introduzione a Angelo Poliziano, Sylvae*, ed. by Francesco Bausi (Firenze: Olschki, 1996), pp. XIX-XX, XXXI; Mario Martelli, 'La semantica di Poliziano e la *Centuria secunda* dei *Miscellanea*', *Rinascimento*, 13 (1973), 21-83 (p. 83).

⁹ On the evolution of diplomacy in Renaissance Italy see Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict: Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and on specific political areas and figures: Riccardo Fubini, *Italia quattrocentesca: politica e diplomazia nell'età di Lorenzo il Magnifico* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1994); Bruno Figliuolo, *Il diplomatico e il trattatista: Ermolao Barbaro ambasciatore della Serenissima e il 'De ufficio legati'* (Napoli: Guida, 1999); Francesco Senatore, "Uno mundo de carta". *Forme e strutture della diplomazia sforzesca* (Napoli: Liguori, 1998); Bruno Figliuolo - Francesco Senatore, 'Per un ritratto del buon ambasciatore: regole di comportamento e profilo dell'inviato negli scritti di Diomede Carafa, Niccolò Machiavelli e Francesco Guicciardini', in *De l'ambassadeur: les écrits relatifs à l'ambassadeur et à l'art de négocier du Moyen Âge au début du XIXe siècle*, ed. by Stefano Andretta, Stéphan Péquignot, Jean-Claude Waquet (Roma: École française de Rome, 2015), pp. 163-185. Important sources are now available thanks to the publication of original diplomatic documentation: *Dispacci sforzeschi da Napoli*, in particular voll. 1 and 2, ed. by Francesco Senatore (Salerno: Carlone, Istituto Italiano per gli studi filosofici, 1997-2004); *Corrispondenza di Giovanni Pontano segretario dei dinasti aragonesi di Napoli (2 novembre 1474-20 gennaio 1495)*, ed. by Bruno Figliuolo (Battipaglia: Laveglia&Carlone, 2012); and *Corrispondenza degli ambasciatori fiorentini a Napoli*, directed by Bruno Figliuolo, voll. 7 (Salerno: CAR; Battipaglia: Laveglia&Carlone, 2005-2015).

intertwined political, rhetorical, and cultural implications.¹⁰ The acknowledgement of the marked encomiastic character of this genre and, as for the early-fifteenth century, its frequent interpretation within Baron's categories of 'civic humanism', has often prevented a lucid and in-depth study of the significance of humanist oratorical texts; however some recent contributions (for example on Leonardo Bruni's orations) have shown the importance of these kinds of works as an invaluable source for gaining a better insight into humanist political thought and the literary strategies adopted to support specific political ideologies and programmes.¹¹

¹⁰ Besides contributions on specific texts, only a few studies are devoted to a more wide-ranging analysis of categories and aspects of this genre: John M. McManamon, *Funeral Oratory in the Cultural Ideals of Italian Humanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); and Anthony D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2004); Marc Van Der Poel, 'Oratory and Declamation', in *A Guide to Neo-Latin Literature*, ed. by Victoria Moul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See also Karl Müllner, *Reden und Briefe italienischer Humanisten, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Pädagogik des Humanismus...* (München: Fink, 1970). A new contribution to the study of the distinctive role of humanist orations within the evolution of diplomacy, with a specific focus on the area of Florence, is Brian Jeffrey Maxson, *The Humanist World of Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); see also Lazzarini, *Communication*, pp. 189-212; Ronald G. Witt, 'Civic Humanism and the Rebirth of the Ciceronian Oration', *Modern Language Quarterly* 51, 2 (1990), 167-84. Important studies have been devoted specifically to Giannozzo Manetti and his diplomatic activity and work: in particular, *Manettiana. La biografia anonima in terzine e altri documenti inediti su Giannozzo Manetti*, ed. by Stefano U. Baldassarri and Bruno Figliuolo (Roma: Roma nel Rinascimento, 2010); *Giannozzo Manetti a Venezia, 1448-1450: con l'edizione della corrispondenza e del 'Dialogus in Symposio'*, ed. by Gabriella Albanese and Bruno Figliuolo (Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2014); Brian Jeffrey Maxson, *The Lost Performance*, in *Voices and Texts in Early Modern Italy*, ed. by S. Dall'Aglia, B. Richardson, M. Rospoche (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 84-96.

¹¹ See James Hankins, 'Rhetoric, History and Ideology: The Civic Panegyrics of Leonardo Bruni', in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. by James Hankins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 143-78; and the considerations on Bruni's funeral oration on Nanni Strozzi in Andrea Rizzi, 'The Choices of Quattrocento Translators', in *Reading and Writing History from Bruni to Windschuttle: Essays in Honour of Gary Ianziti*, ed. by Christian T. Callisen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 19-34. Important observations, also from the more general perspective of the study of humanist political literature, are in Ronald G. Witt, *'In the Footsteps of the Ancients': The*

Hence Poliziano's orations deserve to be studied from a triple angle – literary, historical, and political - and through the combination of these three levels of investigation. This is what this article aims to do, focusing on the two orations written for death of Ferdinando of Aragon and the succession to the throne of Alfonso II. From a political perspective, these works reveal the key role played by the humanist alongside the Medici not only during Lorenzo's age, but also after his death, in the intricate historical context of Piero's rule, in the delicate circumstances that preceded Charles VIII's invasion of Italy in October 1494 and the subsequent fall of the Medici in Florence: both decisive turning points in Florentine, Italian and European history.¹² More generally, the new focus that we can place on Poliziano's late works and consequently on his political commitment in this historical phase can tell us more about the significant part played by literati and intellectuals in Florence alongside the Medici also at the end of the fifteenth century, when a humanist like Poliziano can still rightly be defined a 'humanist in government'. Due to the gradual consolidation of more verticalised

Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni (Leiden: Brill, 2000), in particular on oratory pp. 451-54. On 'civic humanism' and its reconsideration see also footnote 15.

¹² On Piero de' Medici see Patrizia Meli, *Piero de' Medici*, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, ed. by Alberto M. Ghisalberti, Massimiliano Pavan, Fiorella Bartoccini and Mario Caravale (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960-) (from now on DBI), LXXIII, 2009, pp. 158-61; Alison Brown, 'Piero in Power, 1492-94: A Balance Sheet for Four Generations of Medici Control', in *The Medici: Citizens and Masters*, ed. by Robert Black and John E. Law (Florence: The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance studies, 2015), pp. 113-27; Ead., 'The Early Years of Piero di Lorenzo: Between Florentine Citizen and Medici Prince', in Ead., *Medicean and Savonarolan Florence: The Interplay of Politics, Humanism, and Religion* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 67-86. On the turning point of 1494 in Italian history and on the Italian wars see *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy*, ed. by David Abulafia (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995); and Michael Edward Mallett - Christine Shaw, *The Italian Wars* (London: Routledge, 2014; first edition: Harlow, Pearson, 2012).

powers and proto-princely forms of rulership in most Italian centres, even in Florence,¹³ the figure of the Renaissance intellectual was often seen, in an outdated critical view, as gradually losing an active function in political matters, becoming progressively closer to what was generally defined, with a negative nuance and a reductive classification, as an ‘intellettuale cortigiano’, as also Poliziano has been sometimes labelled.¹⁴ However, this oversimplified view has been criticized from many perspectives, also through the radical reconsideration in recent times of Baron’s thesis of ‘civic humanism’, which has shown that already in the first half of the Quattrocento the active political role of humanists was not always the reflection of purely genuine ideological thoughts, but, conversely, of a more complex and less straightforward attitude toward politics.¹⁵

More generally, in the humanist period intellectuals were committed to supporting their states through political activity that was closely connected with their literary work. They were often

¹³ On the evolution of the government in Florence under the Medici see the classic but still fundamental volume by Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence Under the Medici, 1434-1494* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966; second ed., 1997); and *The Medici*.

¹⁴ This definition is still associated with Poliziano in the most comprehensive study of the humanist’s biography by Orvieto, p. 97. More generally, the focus on the eulogistic aim of most humanist literature had for long prevented a lucid evaluation also of other important genres, such as historiography: this view is still present in Eduard Fueter, *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie* (München; Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1911), but it was reconsidered, with specific reference to Neapolitan culture, by Gianvito Resta, *Introduzione*, in *Antonii Panhormitae Liber rerum gestarum Ferdinandi regis*, ed. by Gianvito Resta (Palermo: Centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani, 1968), pp. 5-58; on Milanese historiography and more generally on the important strand of political historiography in the fifteenth century see Gary Ianziti, *Humanistic Historiography under the Sforzas. Politics and Propaganda in 15th Century Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

¹⁵ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955). See now James Hankins, ‘The “Baron Thesis” after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995), 309-38; Id., ‘Rhetoric’; Id., ‘Exclusivist Republicanism and the Non-Monarchical Republic’, *Political Theory*, 38, 4 (2010), 452-82; and the contributions in *Renaissance Civic Humanism*.

involved personally in conceiving sophisticated cultural strategies aimed at effectively putting into practice specific political models, presented through different literary forms: historiography, oratory, treatises and even poetry. This is the case in all Italian centres; more specifically, the aforementioned definition ‘humanist in government’, which fits many authors perfectly, was coined to describe the profile of one of the most prominent intellectuals active in the kingdom of Naples, Antonio Panormita, who played a pivotal function in the construction of the articulated system of cultural politics of the Aragonese monarchy after Alfonso the Magnanimous’s conquest of Naples in 1442.¹⁶ This definition, therefore, highlights the essential contribution made by literati to the creation and strengthening of the political programmes of their states. And as for late fifteenth-century Florence, Poliziano’s orations, in particular, show the humanist’s unexpected and concrete political commitment: a role that becomes more explicit in the last years of Medici rule with the composition of actual ‘official’ texts.

At another level, the analysis of these orations is also vital for the study of Poliziano’s biography and his whole variegated activity. His eclectic figure as an intellectual – one of the major philologists of his age, professor at the *Studio fiorentino*, poet, and historian – is also enriched by the image of his direct political engagement. This aspect also contributes towards refuting the obsolete critical view

¹⁶ The definition of ‘humanist in government’ was given by Alan Ryder, ‘Antonio Beccadelli: A Humanist in Government’, in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance. Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. by Cecil H. Clough (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), pp. 123-40. See also Resta, *Introduzione*. For the creation of a very well-articulated system of cultural politics in fifteenth-century Naples and the close collaboration of intellectuals and humanists in the development of the Aragonese political ideology see Francesco Storti, *El buen marinero: psicologia politica e ideologia monarchica al tempo di Ferdinando I d'Aragona re di Napoli* (Roma: Viella, 2014); Fulvio Delle Donne, *Alfonso il Magnanimo e l'invenzione dell'Umanesimo monarchico. Ideologia e strategie di legittimazione alla corte aragonese di Napoli* (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medioevo, 2015); Guido Cappelli, *Maiestas: politica e pensiero politico nella Napoli aragonese (1443-1503)* (Roma: Carocci Editore, 2016); *Linguaggi e ideologie del Rinascimento monarchico aragonese (1442-1503). Forme della legittimazione e sistemi di governo*, ed. by Fulvio Delle Donne and Antonietta Iacono (Napoli: Federico II University Press, 2018).

that saw two separate phases of Poliziano's life: an early phase characterized by a predominantly poetic production in the vernacular and a more overt support for Laurentian policy; and a second phase, starting in 1480, which coincided with his appointment as professor at the *Studio* and his almost exclusive focus on philological studies and the composition of Latin texts (mainly in prose). It is true that this new role mirrors the parallel change of direction in Lorenzo's cultural politics, which, in this new phase, was meant to enhance the philological branch of humanist culture in Florence, elevating it to the same level as the other more advanced Italian centres in this field: a plan that, once again, had Poliziano as its central pillar, but this time with works that have been usually recognized as not openly political.¹⁷ However, recent studies have underlined the fact that it is more appropriate to describe this change as an evolution, rather than a turning point.¹⁸ Poliziano always displayed a wide-ranging but unitary approach in his literary and cultural activity, which encompasses various dimensions, and very often betrays political overtones. In particular, the purpose of conveying a specific political ideology and supporting Medici rule is apparent in the *Stanze* (1475) and even more evident in the *Coniurationis commentarium* (1478): this historical work was written as the cornerstone of Lorenzo's multi-pronged system of political propaganda after the failure of the Pazzi conspiracy, in a completely different phase of Laurentian culture, when Poliziano also worked as Lorenzo's personal secretary.¹⁹ However, after the consolidation of Lorenzo's power in 1480 and the

¹⁷ For the reconsideration of the two phases in Poliziano's activity see Branca, pp. 3-12; Bausi, *Introduzione*, pp. XXIX-XXXI; Orvieto, pp. 324-25. On the evolution of Lorenzo's cultural politics see Mario Martelli, 'La cultura letteraria nell'età di Lorenzo', in *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo tempo*, ed. by Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Firenze: Olschki, 1992), pp. 39-84; and on Poliziano's role in it see also Id., *Angelo Poliziano: tra storia e metastoria* (Lecce: Conte Editore, 1995), pp. 36-54; Bausi, *Introduzione*, pp. XII-XIII.

¹⁸ See in particular Bausi, *Introduzione*, p. XXXI.

¹⁹ The most recent edition of Poliziano's historical work is Angelo Poliziano, *Coniurationis commentarium*, con introduzione, traduzione e commento, ed. by M. Celati (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2015); for the political perspective that this text shares with the *Stanze* see p. 18 of this edition, and Nicola Gardini, *Rinascimento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2010), pp. 240-46.

transition to a more philologically-based cultural politics, it is in the 1490s, under the rule of Poliziano's former pupil, Piero, that the humanist recovers a properly active political role, writing for the first time texts identifiable as indisputably official. In particular, with the orations for the Florentine diplomats sent to Naples, Poliziano provided his authoritative and concrete backing to Piero's precarious government, which was jeopardized by the increasingly fragmented condition of the Italian states and the inexorable growth of internal dissent in Florence.

In this case the biographical dimension overlaps with the historical horizon, since these works allow us to see from a new angle also Piero's precarious rule and its international implications, and maybe even recognize a continuity (or better an attempt at establishing a continuity) with Lorenzo's politics: a continuum that is encapsulated in the collaboration provided by Poliziano, and also by other prominent intellectuals of Lorenzo's time who kept working alongside the Medici. Among these was Gentile Becchi, who between 1493 and 1494 was the Florentine ambassador in France and was in constant interaction with Piero's government.²⁰ If the close relationship between Poliziano and Lorenzo has always been acknowledged and underlined, nevertheless an even more direct political cooperation seems to link Poliziano and Piero, in a context where the new and inexperienced ruler must have been in urgent need of the collaboration of his former tutor and expert humanist, who had also supported his father amid difficult circumstances.

In order to understand fully the significance of Poliziano's orations, their composition must be contextualized in the intricate diplomatic scenario of the delicate relationships between Florence, Naples and France between mid-1493 and 1494. Charles VIII, the French pretender to the Neapolitan throne, sought allies in Italy for his military enterprise and he had already found a supporter in Ludovico il Moro. Yet Florence, which had always been a loyal partner to France, now displayed ambiguous behavior, being pressed not only by the French side, but also by the Neapolitan side, to which Florence had also been linked by a productive diplomatic relationship especially from 1480

²⁰ See Cecil Gayson, *Gentile Becchi*, in DBI, VII (1970), pp. 491-93; see also Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 215-19.

onwards.²¹ After Ferdinando's death the situation became even more critical. The Florentine ambassador in Naples, Dionigi Pucci (who had been appointed on 26th March 1493) immediately informed Florence with a letter sent the very same day of the king's death, which took place on 25th January;²² moreover the same day also Alfonso, the heir to the throne, sent a letter (actually written by Giovanni Pontano, the royal secretary of the Aragonese monarchs) to Piero de' Medici, informing him of his father's death and of his succession to the throne.²³ Florence replied to its ambassador Dionigi Pucci on the 31st January with a letter by the Signoria, stating at once the intention to send an official diplomatic mission to Naples with two ambassadors, Angelo Niccolini and Pier Filippo Pandolfini, in order to offer the new king Alfonso the formal condolences of the whole state and, at the same time, to commemorate the old ally and celebrate the new monarch.²⁴ It was for this diplomatic mission that Poliziano wrote his orations, which prove to be directly linked with both this letter by the *Signoria* and the following 'lettera d'istruzioni' written on the 8th March by the Florentine government to officially appoint Niccolini and Pandolfini as ambassadors and give them instructions on their mission to Naples (where they arrived on the 28th March and probably delivered the orations on the 2nd April).²⁵ Thus Poliziano composed his works between the end of January and the beginning of March 1494. His orations, as we shall see, develop in a lofty literary style the main

²¹ On this political context see Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 215-22 (where the orations are not mentioned); on Piero's position see also Meli, pp. 158-61. More generally on the context preceding and following the crucial year 1494 see *The French Descent*; and Mallett - Shaw (on the diplomatic politics of Alfonso II in Naples, after his father's death, and the organization of the military defense of his kingdom see in particular pp. 14-15).

²² *Corrispondenza degli ambasciatori fiorentini a Napoli. Inviati diversi (aprile 1493-novembre 1494)*, ed. by Bruno Figliuolo (Napoli: Laveglia&Carlone, 2015), VIII, 475-76.

²³ *Corrispondenza di Giovanni Pontano*, p. 472.

²⁴ *Corrispondenza degli ambasciatori*, pp. 123-124.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-157; 522-523. More generally, on the procedures of welcoming the ambassadors, the presentation of the letter of credence, and the delivery of the prepared speeches see Maxson, *The Humanist World*, pp. 90-92.

points sketched in the official letters of the Florentine government, which provide a kind of summary of the most important political guidelines for the orators.

It is worth specifying that Poliziano was not a professional ambassador, as other humanists were (an emblematic case is, among others, Giannozzo Manetti, who both composed and delivered his speeches as an orator),²⁶ and he did not take part in the diplomatic mission to Naples. However, his oratorical texts can be seen as a significant example of an established practice that also connected the cultural and political world: indeed in this period many diplomatic speeches were written by humanists and literati to be delivered by professional orators, who did not have the same exceptional literary skills as the authors of these pieces.²⁷ This was the case especially in crucial diplomatic missions to be sent to very prestigious figures, when a more sophisticated style was expected in the speeches and when a eulogistic aim was often an integral part of the political discourse. Thus, Poliziano's works confirm the diffusion of this practice (in late fifteenth-century Florence), which is not always easy to identify because of the lack of extant sources. Moreover, in many cases the involvement of various figures at different levels in a specific diplomatic event results in the creation of different versions of the same speech: one composed by the professional writer and another uttered by the professional orator (and this latter version is usually rarely testified by written sources, as in the case of the Florentine mission to Naples).²⁸ Moreover, Poliziano's orations also prove that, although he was not an orator, he was directly engaged in the Florentine diplomatic activity as a writer

²⁶ See the studies on Giannozzo Manetti's diplomatic activity and work mentioned in footnote 10.

²⁷ On this practice see Maxson, *The Humanist World*, pp. 125-126 (in general on the importance of orations in Renaissance diplomacy see chapter 5 in the same volume).

²⁸ On the relationship between different diplomatic records see the specific cases analysed in Francesco Senatore, 'Il principato di Salerno durante la Guerra dei Baroni (1460-1463). Dai carteggi diplomatici al *De bello Neapolitano*', *Rassegna storica salernitana*, 11, 2 (1994), 29-114; Maxson, 'The Lost Performance', pp. 84-96; Isabella Lazzarini, 'Lettere, minute, registri: pratiche della scrittura diplomatica nell'Italia tardomedievale tra storia e paleografia', *Quaderni storici*, 152 (2016), 449-70.

of political texts, and he was assigned this role thanks to a combination of factors: his remarkable literary talent, his renown as one of the most illustrious Italian intellectuals throughout Europe, and his long-lasting political commitment alongside the Medici family also in the most delicate phases of Florentine politics. In particular, in the precarious situation of the threat of the French invasion that loomed over the new weak Medici government, Piero needed the cultural and political collaboration of his eminent former tutor more than ever. But what is most significant is that Poliziano's orations, and the associated diplomatic mission, played a fundamental political role (not previously recognized by scholars) in the broader historical context of those critical years. Indeed, they turn out to be informed by the specific aim to renew and confirm the alliance between Florence and Naples, with crucial consequences for the whole unstable international scenario.

It is necessary to focus more closely on the orations' content and style in order to better understand their literary value and political meaning, as well as their direct connection with Florence's new policy, which is clearly revealed by Poliziano's texts.²⁹ Both orations (written for the death of Ferdinando of Aragon and the succession to the throne of Alfonso II) closely follow the traditional *partitiones* established by the canon of classical oratory, with an *exordium*, a brief central section loosely corresponding with the *narratio* and *confirmatio*, and a closing *peroratio*. The first oration revolves around the commemoration of Ferdinando, described as a perfect prince, and the celebration of the continuity between his government and the upcoming rule of his son Alfonso:³⁰ in a common literary *topos*, the heir is portrayed as having already proved to be the best possible successor, from the perspective of both the government of the kingdom and its relationship with its allies. The *exordium* opens with the presentation of the deep mourning of the whole city of Florence for the death

²⁹ The two orations are published in *Omnia opera*, ff. aaiiir-aiiiv.

³⁰ This continuity was also underlined by the symbolic rituals carried out in the Neapolitan kingdom to ratify and celebrate Alfonso's new rule: see Giuliana Vitale, *Ritualità monarchica cerimonie e pratiche devozionali nella Napoli aragonese* (Salerno: Laveglia, 2006), pp. 15-20, 58-61. On Ferdinando see in particular Ernesto Pontieri, *Per la storia del regno di Ferrante I d'Aragona re di Napoli* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1968).

of Ferdinando, who was seen as a generous father, and thereafter underlines the importance of the diplomatic mission of the orators, who are described as representatives of the whole Florentine community. After this introductory section, Poliziano depicts Ferdinando as an exemplary prince, following the traditional model of the ideal *princeps* portrayed by humanists in the numerous mirrors for princes produced in those years, a literary genre that enjoyed remarkable diffusion in the second half of the fifteenth century.³¹ Ferdinando is represented as a virtuous sovereign who left a prosperous and flourishing kingdom to his heir and, consequently, acquires immortal glory. At this point, Poliziano's eulogy turns to the portrayal of Alfonso, who is described as having already proved his ruling skills while he carried out his duties as duke of Calabria, helping his father in war and in administering the kingdom. Finally, in the closing section, the focus is placed on the solid tie between Naples and Florence. The fruitfulness of this bond is evidenced by the long list of 'strengths', means and assets of the Aragonese kingdom, which are presented through the rhetorical tool of accumulation. In conclusion, with an emphatic statement, the alliance between the two states is depicted as being made even stronger by the commitment of Florence to be always loyal and offer its full support in any circumstance.

The second oration focuses on Alfonso, on his immediate succession and the first phases of his rule. The *exordium* opens this time with the reference to the uncontainable joy felt by Florence in seeing the stability and peacefulness of the Neapolitan kingdom under the new ruler, who immediately secured the favour of the people and demonstrated the same princely virtues inherited from his *divinissimus* father. In the central section, Poliziano's discourse shifts to an essentially

³¹ On the development of the genre of mirrors for princes in the fifteenth century see at least Felix Gilbert, 'The Humanist Concept of the Prince and The Prince of Machiavelli', in Id., *History: Choice and Commitment* (Cambridge - London, Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 91-114; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), I, pp. 113-38; Davide Canfora, *Prima di Machiavelli: Politica e cultura in età umanistica* (Milano: Laterza 2005); on political humanism in Naples, Cappelli, *Maiestas*, and Id., *Introduzione* in Giovanni Pontano, *De Principe*, ed. by G. Cappelli (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2003), pp. XI-LX.

political dimension, which implicitly encompasses the wider Italian situation. Alfonso is presented as the only guide able to provide peace and prosperity not only to his kingdom, but to the whole Italian peninsula. So the new king seems to be assigned a more pivotal and delicate role than just the rule of Naples, since he is encouraged to bring concord throughout Italy, putting an end to all conflicts among the states and protecting all of them in particular from the Ottoman threat. This menace was often evoked by humanists as one of the most dangerous perils of that period, especially in their exhortations addressed to different rulers, who were urged to defeat, once and for all, these enemies (who are defined in Poliziano's work as 'dreadful and voracious beasts').³² Although Poliziano does not mention any specific historical event in his text, it is probably no coincidence that Alfonso had already demonstrated his military value in fighting the Ottomans a few years before, when he won the famous battle of Otranto in 1480 and liberated the city (which was part of the Aragonese domain) from the siege of the Turkish troops.³³ However, Poliziano's reference to Alfonso as the leader able to eradicate discord among Italian states can also be connected with the critical diplomatic situation arising from the threat of the French invasion, which had Naples as its direct target, but, according to the view implicitly emerging in the oration, would lead the whole peninsula into a dangerous crisis.

The following section of the central part of the oration is entirely devoted to the eulogy of Alfonso, which is longer than Ferdinando's portrayal in the previous oration and amounts to almost an actual *speculum principis* on a small scale, since the new ruler is described as being endowed with the main

³² On the numerous works devoted to these issues see James Hankins, 'Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 49 (1995), 111-207; Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: Penn University of Pennsylvania press, 2004); Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.; London : Harvard University Press, 2008); Gabriella Albanese, 'La storiografia umanistica e l'avanzata turca', in *La conquista turca di Otranto (1480) tra storia e mito*. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di studio (Otranto-Muro Leccese, 28-31 marzo 2007), ed. by Hubert Houben (Galatina: Congedo, 2008), pp. 319-52.

³³ On this event and the literary works on it see *La conquista turca*.

princely virtues recalled in a long list (e.g. justice, constancy, liberality, clemency, and humanity). More precisely, Alfonso's attributes are described as including both military skills and 'pacis artes', among which *sapientia* is placed in the foreground: this all-embracing combination of leadership skills, displayed both in peace and in war, was traditionally at the core of the representation of exemplary rulers already in the classical tradition, when for example it was ascribed to Scipio,³⁴ one of the classical figures most frequently employed in Humanism as a multifunctional symbol of virtuous political behavior. Moreover, Poliziano's eulogy openly identifies Alfonso as a perfect *princeps*, tracing an overt comparison with the famous exemplary figure of Cyrus of Persia, celebrated by Xenophon in his *Cyropedia*, a classical prefiguration of the genre of the *specula principis* which was often adopted by humanists as a model in their work.³⁵ Actually, Poliziano, using a common rhetorical amplification involving hyperbole, defines Alfonso as even surpassing the virtues of Cyrus, so potentially an even more glorious monarch. Finally, the oration ends with the reaffirmation of Florence's loyalty to Naples, presented by emphasizing the important role of the ambassadors, who speak on behalf of the whole Florentine community. The very last words in the *explicit*, addressed to God as a prayer, are an emphatic wish for a long and prosperous rule: an

³⁴ Livy, XXXVIII, 53: 'vir memorabilis bellicis tamen quam pacis artibus memorabilior' ('a man memorable more for his military skills than for the skills he showed in peace').

³⁵ On the Latin translation of the *Cyropedia* produced by Poggio Bracciolini in 1446 and offered to Alfonso of Aragon, see Cappelli, *Introduzione*, p. LII, and *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum*, ed. by Paul Oscar Kristeller *et al.* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1960-), VII, pp. 116-21. Also Lorenzo Valla translated for Alfonso the Magnanimous and the young Ferdinando the first four chapters of the *Cyropedia* in 1438, presenting Cyrus as an exemplary prince: see David Marsh, 'Lorenzo Valla In Naples: The Translation From Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 46 (1984), 407-20; on the reception of Xenophon see also Noreen Humble, 'Xenophon and the Instruction of Princes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon*, ed. by Michael Flower (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 416-34.

invocation that was contradicted by the future tragic outcome of Alfonso's government which would last only one year, since he would abdicate in January 1495 after facing the French invasion.³⁶

Although in the speeches the most burning contemporary political issues are just evoked and never openly addressed, the two texts are specifically oriented at re-affirming the diplomatic partnership with Naples, presenting this direction in Piero's foreign politics as the most advantageous for Florence, especially in comparison with an alliance with Charles VIII, who had put and was still putting pressure on Piero to obtain his support in the planned war against Naples. In particular, Charles VIII was threatening Piero that he would foment the already considerable internal dissent in Florence, supporting the other branch of the Medici family, led by Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, who were plotting to seize power overthrowing Piero's rule.³⁷ Piero, in this situation of uncertainty, appeared unresolved and kept Charles VIII in suspense for months, despite his pressure.³⁸ However, the direction of Florentine politics seems to have been gradually more clearly oriented towards an alliance with Naples, as Poliziano's orations would finally openly state in March 1494 through the official channels of diplomacy.

If we take a step back it is possible to have a broader view of this intricate scenario in which Poliziano's texts are pivotal protagonists. At an earlier stage, the other Italian states too pushed Florence into what looked like a position of stalemate. In particular Ludovico il Moro had offered his help to France and tried to convince other Italian rulers to do the same: an outcome that appeared more concrete with the agreement signed on 25th April 1493 among Milan, Venice and Rome. Tellingly, in Florence this move was followed by a letter by Poliziano to Giovanni Pontano, the leading figure of Neapolitan humanism, secretary to Ferdinando and deeply involved in the political matters of the Aragonese monarchy: the letter, sent on 8th May 1493, is a eulogy of Pontano and,

³⁶ On Alfonso II see in particular Raffaele Mormone, *Alfonso II d'Aragona, re di Napoli*, in DBI, II (1960), pp. 331-32.

³⁷ On Gentile Becchi's letters which inform Piero of this threat see Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 215-19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-22.

through him, of king Ferdinando and his son Alfonso.³⁹ This epistle already shows Florence's intention of strengthening (rather than freezing) its relationship with Naples, though only indirectly at this stage and only through the literary vehicle of the correspondence between two of the major Italian intellectuals, who were the main representatives of their respective states. Moreover, the aforementioned official letter written by Pontano to Piero de' Medici on behalf of Alfonso of Aragon, immediately after king Ferdinando's death, on the 25th January 1494, also proves the determination of the Neapolitan rule to keep solid the diplomatic bond with Florence in the transition from Ferrante's to Alfonso's government: this was a political alliance that from the perspective of the Neapolitan kingdom was particularly vital, since Naples was the direct target of the French threats.⁴⁰ If Alfonso (or rather, Pontano on his behalf) immediately sent letters to several political leaders to inform them about Ferrante's death, using similar rhetorical motifs aimed at stressing the good relationship between their states,⁴¹ nevertheless it is in the epistle to Piero that the reference to the preservation of their alliance is put forward with more emphasis and is combined with the explicit request for political collaboration, advice, and more generally support.⁴² However, despite this elaborate network of relationships between Naples and Florence, Piero maintained his ambiguous position with France until the first months of 1494. On 8th March Gentile Becchi sent him a letter urging him to respond to the *ultimatum* imposed by Charles VIII, who demanded a final answer about a possible alliance by

³⁹ The letter (in the manuscript of the Vatican Library, Vat. Capp. 235, f. 205r-206v) is published in Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 225-33.

⁴⁰ *Corrispondenza di Giovanni Pontano*, p. 472.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 472-475.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 472: 'La magnificentia vostra voglia conrespondere al'amore che li portamo in abbracciare et favorire le cose nostre como proprie, et recardarne et consigliarne se per noi se ha da fare più una cosa che una altra, perché sempre li consigli vostri ne serranno carissimi; et la magnificentia vostra porrà disporre del statu et cose nostre come dele proprie' [Your magnificence may want to reciprocate the love we have for you and consider and favour our affairs as your own, and remember and advise us whether one thing is better than another, because your advice will always be very important for us; and your magnificence will be able to use everything in our state as if belonging to you].

11th March.⁴³ Nevertheless, the evidence provided by Poliziano's orations, composed by the first few days of the same month, reveals that Florence had already decided to take Naples's side. As we have seen, the letter of instruction for the ambassadors sent to Naples to deliver Poliziano's orations is dated 8th March, the very same day as Becchi's letter, but the Florentine government had already announced the plan of organizing this diplomatic mission in the letter to the ambassador Dionigi Pucci dated 31st January, which is also preceded by Poliziano's eulogistic letter to Pontano of the previous year.

The orations, therefore, mark the final step in the process of consolidation of the alliance between Florence and Naples, showing that in the first months of 1494 the intricate diplomatic situation came to a turning point. In these delicate circumstances, Poliziano provides his literary contribution, this time explicitly political, to the formal confirmation of Florence's position in the international scenario. More specifically, the political relevance of the humanist's orations is also demonstrated by a number of connections that these texts display with the letter sent to Pucci by the *Signoria* and the letter of instructions for the ambassadors.⁴⁴ So the case study of Poliziano's speeches is also an emblematic example of the relationship among different sources concerning a single diplomatic mission and it allows us to investigate this event on the basis of various kinds of records (an analysis that in many other cases is not possible to carry out due to the frequent lack of evidence). In particular Poliziano's first oration and the 'lettera d'istruzioni' by the Florentine government to appoint Niccolini and Pandolfini begin with a very similar commemoration of Ferdinando, who in both texts is represented as a father-figure for Florence, which joins the Neapolitan community in the deep grief for this loss:

⁴³ Becchi's letter is published in Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 220-21.

⁴⁴ On the connections, but also differences, between the various records and sources related to the same diplomatic mission see footnote 28.

Audito Ferdinandi sapientissimi regis obitu, Florentina civitas, invicte Alphonse rex, non minus consternata est, quam si ipsa quoque tecum parente indulgentissimo esset orbata. Nullum enim ab eo nostra respublica vel studium, vel officium desiderabat, quod praestare unquam pius genitor etiam carissimis liberis consuevisset.

[Having heard about the death of the very wise king Ferdinando, invincible Alfonso, the city of Florence was as dismayed as if it too had been deprived of a most loving father. Indeed, our state wanted from him nothing but the assistance and help that a loving father usually has for his very dear children].⁴⁵

...exporrete il dispiacere et mestitia gravissima preso universalmente tucta la città, intendendo lo inopinato et molestissimo caso della morte del re Ferrando di gloriosa memoria; per essere la città nostra per tale caso privata d'uno sì singulare padre, protectore et benefactore.⁴⁶

[...you, ambassadors, will present the deep sorrow and grief that has caught the whole city, when we heard about the unexpected and sad news of the death of Ferdinando, a king of glorious renown; since our city, because of his death, has been deprived of a father, a guardian, and benefactor.]

In the oration, the image of mourning a dead father is framed in a more sophisticated literary texture and is amplified through the lofty rhetorical style typical of oratory, which in this case enhances the eulogistic tone of Poliziano's commemoration of the king. Additionally, it is possible also to recognize in this recurring thematic element, either developed in a more refined literary framework or simply hinted at, the adoption of the traditional political motif that associates the figure of the ruler with the image of a *pater* and, consequently, the state with a family, in a highly organic conception

⁴⁵ The orations are quoted from *Omnia opera*, ff. aaiiir-aiiir (punctuation has been modernized). All translations are mine. For this specific passage: f. aaiiir.

⁴⁶ *Corrispondenza degli ambasciatori*, p. 156.

of rulership that enjoyed considerable fortune in the fifteenth century, as confirmed also by the frequent adoption of the image of the *pater patriae* in political literature.⁴⁷

Moreover, in the letter of 31st January to Dionigi Pucci, the *Signoria* also evokes the broader Italian political situation.⁴⁸ This allusion, as we have seen, is expanded and developed in Poliziano's second oration, where, in particular, the favour accorded by Florence to the new king of Naples is put into relation with his key role in pursuing the common interest of bringing peace in the discordant, *dissentientem*, Italy:

Et enim si votis optandus rex fuisset, non alium profecto quicumque rebus italis favent a superis poposcissent, quam eum principem qui, ductu imperioque suo, dissentientem Italiam pacavisset; idemque feras illas et sanguinarias Turcorum nationes, tot contentionibus, tot praeliis, tanto labore, tanto etiam periculo, a nostris iugulis, a nostris cervicibus, a templis, ab altaribus depulisset.⁴⁹

[If a king could be elected by votes, certainly anyone who cares about the Italian situation would not ask gods for anything but the very prince who, with his command and guide, could be able to pacify Italy, which is full of discord; the very same prince who would be able to defeat those ferocious and bloodthirsty Ottomans, with so much force, effort, pain, and great danger, driving them back from our throats, shoulders, temples and altars.]

Other significant parallel elements link Poliziano's orations with the official epistles by the Florentine government. In particular, a key point is the reinforcement of the alliance with Naples, which is renewed by Florence also with the new ruler Alfonso. So the diplomatic bond between the

⁴⁷ On this concept see Manlio Pastore Stocchi, 'Il pensiero politico degli umanisti', in *Storia delle idee politiche, economiche e sociali*, ed. by Luigi Firpo (Torino: UTET, 1987), III, pp. 57-60. Fulvio Delle Donne, 'Le parole del principe: effetto di realtà e costruzione del consenso', in *Linguaggi*, pp. 14-24 (p. 16).

⁴⁸ *Corrispondenza degli ambasciatori*, p. 123.

⁴⁹ *Omnia opera*, f. aaiiv.

two states is emphatically presented as indissoluble and resting on a long and strong relationship, as clearly emerges in the ‘lettera di istruzioni’ and, even more decisively, in the humanist’s second oration:

[...] in qualunque nostra occorrentia la maestà sua *non solum* debbi perseverare nello amore et benivolentia siamo certissimi ci porta, ma se possibile è restringere ancor più lo arcissimo vincolo della mutua amicitia et coniunctione habbiamo per constantissimo essere tra la sua regia maestà et la nostra republica...⁵⁰

[in any circumstances your majesty has not only to maintain the love and benevolence that we are sure you have for us, but, if it is possible, we also have to make the already tight bond of our mutual friendship and connection even closer, a link that we know is very stable in connecting your royal majesty and our republic];

In communi laetitia vehementius tamen Florentina civitas exultat, sic ut vix capere animis inexplabilem laetitiam possit. [...] Ipsa mediusfidiis tecta urbis et moenia nobis huc proficiscentibus gestiebant et, quod rerum natura non patitur, revelli pene a solo urbs et cupere ipsa nobiscum ire ad te gratulatum videbatur, quod quoniam non potuit, nos tamen potissimum cives suos publice misit, ut isto nobis gratissimo munere defungeremur...⁵¹

[The city of Florence rejoices in the common happiness even more enthusiastically, so much that it is barely able to control its unfettered joy. [...] The very buildings and walls of our city were impatient to see us coming to you and the city itself almost seemed to lift off the ground since it wanted to come with us to congratulate you, a thing that is not allowed by nature; and because this is not possible, the city sent us as its citizens on behalf of the whole state to carry out this very grateful duty...]

⁵⁰ *Corrispondenza degli ambasciatori*, p. 156.

⁵¹ *Omnia opera*, f. aaaiiiv.

In the literary work, Poliziano intensifies the idea of the close relationship between Florence and Naples by means of sophisticated rhetorical tools typical of oratory. He adopts the metaphorical image of the buildings and walls of the city, which, sketched in a lively personification, are depicted as wanting to move to Naples to show the closeness of the whole state to the kingdom, but, since it is not possible, the city appointed the ambassadors to speak on its behalf. Thus, it is again the literary medium which confers more authoritative force to the important diplomatic message, as is typical of humanist orations.

But the contribution of the literary sphere to the consolidation of Florence's political operation also emerges in another text by Poliziano, which is deeply intertwined from a thematic, stylistic, and ideological perspective with the orations. This is again a letter sent by the Florentine humanist to Giovanni Pontano, but this time one composed in 1494, with the very same aim as the speeches of offering Poliziano's and Piero's condolences for Ferdinando's death. Although the date of this epistle is unknown, the letter is inextricably dovetailed with Poliziano's diplomatic texts and turns out to be inspired by the same political intentions of reinforcing the bond between the two states.⁵² Consequently it is possible to suppose that it was almost certainly written in the very same days as the orations, but probably after them, because the two official works were more urgently needed and had to be ready in time for the diplomatic mission to Naples. But what is most noteworthy is that the epistle is linked with the first orations by direct intertextual references, especially in the passages containing the commemoration of Ferdinando and the celebration of Alfonso as the heir of his virtues, where the emphasis is placed on the continuity of the two rulers (a point that is also made in the aforementioned official epistles of the Florentine government for the ambassadors). Using a specific literary *topos*, in both Poliziano's letter to Pontano and the diplomatic speech, Alfonso's new government is presented as able to mitigate the common grief for his father's death:

⁵² *Omnia opera*, epist. II, 8. The letter is published also in Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 223-25.

Angelus Politianus Ioviano Pontano s. d.

Etsi magnum te dolorem Ferdinandi regis interitu cepisse non dubito...tamen, [...] cum vobis regni haeres (quod felix faustumque sit) Alfonsus alter, maximus natu filius, obtigerit, cuius excellens ingenium, singularis virtus, incredibilis sapientia bello et pace claruit, ingrati profecto fuerimus, si non quantum relictum, sed quantum sit ademptum respexerimus [...]⁵³

[*Angelo Poliziano to Giovanni Pontano*. Although it is no doubt that you have been caught by deep sorrow after Ferdinando's death [...] nevertheless, since the reins of the kingdom (which is prosperous and wealthy) have been handed down to Alfonso, his oldest son, whose excellent intelligence, unique virtue, incredible wisdom stand out in war and in peace, we would be ungrateful, if we considered only what we lost and not what remained to us].

Audito Ferdinandi sapientissimi regis obitu, Florentina civitas, invicte Alphonse rex, non minus consternata est, quam si ipsa quoque tecum parente indulgentissimo esset orbata. [...] Multa autem sese nobis offerunt, quae nimium luctum quasi suo iure castigent. [...] Tibi, inquam, regnum hoc tradidit, Alphonse rex maximo natu filio, tot rebus, tot bellis exercitato, quem totiens victorem complexus est, totiens triumphantem prosecutus, cuique vivens adhuc regni totius habenas domi forisque tradiderat, cuiusque vigilantia fretus in utram vellet aurem, quod dicitur, otiosus dormiebat.⁵⁴

[Having heard about the death of the very wise king Ferdinando, invincible Alfonso, the city of Florence was as dismayed as if it too had been deprived of a most loving father. [...] However many considerations occur to us which rightly disapprove of excessive grief. [...] Your father has handed down his reign to you, king Alfonso: his oldest son, expert in many fields, and in many wars; the son whom, several time, he has embraced as winner, and whom, several times, he welcomed in triumph,

⁵³ Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 223-24.

⁵⁴ *Omnia opera*, f. aaiiir-v.

and to whom, while he was still alive, he had bequeathed the reins of whole kingdom, at home and abroad. Confident in his son's control, he could sleep on either ear in total peace].

Besides these parallels between the letter to Pontano and the first oration, the most remarkable connections, this time also linguistic, emerge in the description of the prosperity and military might of the kingdom of Naples, which is framed by Poliziano employing the very same words in both texts:

Micto necessitudines alias, amicos, socios, adiumenta, praesidia, stabilimentaue regni tanta; micto popularium studia, quae prius etiam per se prompta, tua tamen quoque liberalitas evocavit.⁵⁵

[I do not even need to mention all the other connections, friends, allies, assistance, defences and many other supports of the kingdom; and I do not need to mention the people's love, which, although it was already evident in itself, your goodness has reinforced.]

Mitto necessitudines alias, opes, exercitus, duces, socios, studia popularium, praesidia, munimenta, propugnacula, quae nullis pene humanis viribus labefactari posse videantur.⁵⁶

[I do not need to mention the other connections, resources, armies, leaders, allies, the people's love, protections, defenses, supports, all things that almost no human force can undermine.]

The political viewpoint informing these passages is not only aimed at consolidating the relationship with Naples, but also at presenting this alliance as the best political choice for Florence. This standpoint is implicitly conveyed through the long and insistent enumeration, almost identical in both sentences, which lists all elements that manifest the solid power of the kingdom. More broadly, this

⁵⁵ *Omnia opera*, f. aaiiir-v.

⁵⁶ Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 223-224.

outlook is also put forward in the letter in the triple eulogy of Ferdinando's government, his heir, and the most distinguished humanist close to the Aragonese rulers, Pontano.

Alongside the carefully-framed political perspective, Poliziano's orations and his letter display a sophisticated literary character, which bestows authority on the political message in these texts. In particular, in the diplomatic speeches, the subtle reworking of classical sources betrays the application of the humanist's famous poetics of *docta varietas* also in the domain of political writing.⁵⁷ More specifically, the lexical texture of the diplomatic speeches is woven through the eclectic conflation of verbal expressions drawn from different orations by Cicero, a model that, notwithstanding Poliziano's very well-known criticism of intransigent Ciceronianism, in this case was probably regarded by the humanist as the most authoritative and unavoidable prototype. However, Poliziano's inspiring principle is always the pursuit of erudite variety: this attitude emerges, on the one hand, in the combination of references drawn from different works by Cicero (without choosing a single oration as main model), on the other, in the fusion of the most illustrious classical oratorical model with sources belonging to completely different literary fields. A remarkable example can be found in the first oration, where the metaphor employed to describe Ferdinando's confidence in his son's rule ('cuiusque vigilantia fretus in utram vellet aurem, quod dicitur, otiosus dormiebat'; '[Ferdinandus], confident in his son's control, could sleep in peace on either ear') is framed through a direct quotation from Terence's *Heautontimoroumenos*, 349-350 ('ademptum tibi iam faxo omnem metum,/ in aurem utramvis otiose ut dormias'; 'I will put all fear away from you, so that you can sleep in peace on either ear').

Thus, both this refined blend of classical sources and the direct relation with the letter to Pontano contribute to manifesting the prominent literary nature of these politically-driven works. In particular, the direct link between Poliziano's orations and epistles significantly reflects the close interchange between different compartments of the humanist's literary output, in this case all oriented towards

⁵⁷ On Poliziano's poetics see in particular McLaughlin, pp. 188-227.

supporting the Medici government. It is no coincidence that in the very same years, Poliziano was working on the publishing project of his ‘Libro delle epistole’ with the blessing of Piero and Gentile Becchi (however, in the end it was published only posthumously, and with several revisions, in the Aldine edition of Poliziano’s *Opera omnia* in 1498).⁵⁸ The main purpose was to disseminate the epistolary correspondence of the spearhead of Florentine culture, which would be able to prove his international renown and, indirectly, to shine a positive bright light on Piero’s weak government.⁵⁹ This *Libro* was an extremely eclectic and multifaceted collection of letters, including texts with completely different thematic and stylistic features (from philological letters to historical and political epistles), as Poliziano himself acknowledged with his significant use of the term ‘miscellanea’ being linked to his epistolary collection in the very first letter (‘miscellanea non epistulas composuisse’; ‘I composed different kinds of texts not epistles’ *Epist.* I, 1). However, at the same time, a unifying

⁵⁸ The definition ‘Libro delle epistole’ was used by Poliziano in a letter sent to Piero de’ Medici on the 23rd May 1494, where he states that he has finished to work on his epistolary collection: see *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite di Angelo Ambrogini detto il Poliziano raccolte e illustrate da Isidoro del Lungo* (Firenze: Barbera, 1867), p. 85. The first four books are now published in Angelo Poliziano, *Letters*. Books I-IV, ed. by Shane Butler (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006 -). See also Augusto Campana, ‘Per il carteggio del Poliziano’, *La Rinascita*, 6 (1943), 437-72; and now Frank La Brasca, ‘La correspondance d’Angelo Politien (1454-1494). La lettre (en)volée ou Comment on fabrique un recueil épistolaire’, in *Epistulae antiquae II. Actes du II^e Colloque “Le genre épistolaire antique et ses prolongements européens”* (Université François-Rabelais, Tours, 28-30 septembre 2000), ed. by Elisabeth Gavoille, Leon Nadjo (Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 2002), pp. 387-406.

⁵⁹ On the political function of Poliziano’s book of epistles see Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 205-66. More generally, on the cultural and literary role of epistolary collections in the Renaissance see Marc Fumaroli, ‘Genèse de l’épistolographie classique: rhétorique humaniste de la lettre, de Petrarque à Juste Lipse’, *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 78 (1978), 866-905; Claudio Griggio, ‘Dalla lettera all’epistolario: aspetti retorico-formali dell’epistolografia umanistica’, in *Alla lettera. Teorie e pratiche epistolari dai Greci al Novecento*, ed. by Adriana Chemello (Milano: Guerini, 1998), pp. 83-107.

cultural and political perspective subtends this heterogeneous collection, which can be regarded as the manifesto of an advanced cultural programme carried out within, and in support of, Piero's rule.

Poliziano's letter to Pontano of 1494 was included in the *Libro* of epistles, as was also another important letter of the same year: the very famous 'epistola assai grande' written to Pico della Mirandola on 20th May, whose insertion into Poliziano's epistolary was openly approved and encouraged by Gentile Becchi.⁶⁰ This letter celebrates Piero's merciful behaviour after the thwarted conspiracy against him by his cousins, Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco, which was planned to take place on the anniversary of the Pazzi conspiracy, 26th April 1494. Once again, if we put the letter to Pico in relation with the orations, the common crucial implications of these texts in both Florence's foreign and domestic politics appear clearly. The epistle, indeed, praises Piero and condemns his internal enemies, who were supported by France in this specific phase (as we have seen) and, therefore, were opponents to the alliance with Naples. So this letter can be traced back to the same political guidelines proclaimed, this time publicly, in Poliziano's orations: the twofold purpose was to justify Piero's pro-Aragon and anti-French diplomatic choice and support his, interconnected, politics towards his internal enemies.

In conclusion, the analysis of Poliziano's works reveals an articulated attempt to protect Florence. This was carried out in the last months of Piero's government by all possible means, including effective literary instruments. But it would turn out to be a last-ditch effort in a situation that perhaps was already irrevocably compromised, as the events immediately following would prove, with the overthrow of the governments both in Florence and Naples, which marks a crucial turning point in Italian and European history. Poliziano died less than two months before the Medici fall in November 1494, when Piero declared himself neutral to Charles VIII, but actually surrendered to the incoming French army provoking an uprising in Florence. However, the humanist acted as one of the keystones

⁶⁰ The letter was published for the first time in Lorenzo D'Amore, *Epistole inedite di Angelo Poliziano* (Napoli: D'Auria, 1909), pp. 38-40, and now in Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*, pp. 211-13.

of the Medici's multi-pronged cultural politics until his last days (as he had already done in other crucial circumstances in the past), showing, this time in the most apparent way, the inextricable interplay between the literary and political dimensions of his output, and, equally importantly, the wide-ranging nature of his literary activity, which encompasses multiple genres and literary forms, in this case oratory and epistolography. Poliziano's direct involvement in Florence's diplomatic activity also provides a further representative example of the close interchange between politics and culture that is characteristic of Italy in the fifteenth century, when diplomacy underwent a significant evolution. With specific reference to the area of 'international' relations, these orations demonstrate the involvement of literati at different levels: indeed, in this period humanists were directly engaged in their states' politics not only as professional orators and authors of their own speeches (like, for example, Giannozzo Manetti), but also as skilled writers (like Poliziano) of important and rhetorically sophisticated orations to be delivered by simpler ambassadors. In the case of the Florentine diplomatic mission to Naples in 1494, the intertextual connections that links the different sources concerning this event reveal the close interaction of multiple fields (the spheres of internal politics, foreign politics, diplomacy, rhetoric and literature) in the making of the compound horizon of a state's politics. More precisely, in Poliziano's orations, which consist in the most official contribution to Florentine politics in the difficult phase of the first months of 1494, it is the literary component what makes the diplomatic message more effective, conveying it through lofty rhetorical channels. In Poliziano's view, literature is always the main interpretative means for understanding the human world and, consequently, literature builds the foundations of his enterprises in all fields: poetry, philology and also politics, always with an eclectic attitude that is the real essence of his very nature of literary genius.

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